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# Scientists at a loss as bees disappear across the nation



**Byron Crawford**

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apiculture extension program.

Although Kentucky is not on the list of states with CCD -- which includes Indiana and Ohio -- some Kentucky beekeepers have suffered serious losses in honeybee numbers since last fall.

"'Weird' is about the best word you can use to describe it," said commercial beekeeper Kent Williams of Graves County, commenting on the widespread disappearance of honeybees.

Colony Collapse Disorder, or CCD, is the collective name scientists are using for a mysterious vanishing of entire honeybee colonies in about 25 states.

"It is a crisis for beekeepers and it is a crisis for people who are growing bee-pollinated crops," said Thomas Webster, a researcher with Kentucky State University's



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KSU Cooperative Service The disappearance of tens of millions of honeybees is of critical concern to scientists.

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Near Centerfield in Oldham County, orchard owner John Adams said the bees in most of his 11 hives are gone without a trace.

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"I've got double hives that should have 50,000 to 60,000 bees in them that look like you've taken an air hose and cleaned the hive out," said Adams. "There was plenty of bees out there last October. This thing is weird."

Among the hardest hit nationally are commercial beekeepers who transport thousands of hives across the country by tractor-trailer to pollinate orchards and crops, sometimes at rental rates of more than \$100 a hive.

"I know of one beekeeper who lost 9,000 hives out of his 10,000," said Webster. "Since there's a shortage of strong, healthy hives, some crops are not getting the pollination that they need, or the person growing the crops is having to pay more money to rent the hives from the beekeepers."

The result may be higher prices for certain produce, and perhaps less availability, but not an overwhelming food crisis, Webster said.

Melons and squash, some vegetables, sunflowers, almonds and many fruit and berry crops need bee pollination. Alfalfa grown for seed also requires pollination by bees, though pollination may be shared by other bee varieties.

"Gardens are definitely affected," said Webster. "I know people who have bees just to make sure their gardens produce, and we just have fewer bees in the area. This is going to be especially a problem in urban areas where maybe there are some restrictions on beekeeping."

The absence of bees, dead or alive, presents a dilemma for researchers.

"It's hard to do an autopsy without a corpse," said

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Webster. "When the mites were hitting the beekeepers it was pretty bad, but at least then we knew what it was."

Phil Craft, state apiarist for the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, said bee losses in Kentucky -- while about twice the normal number -- may be linked more to bad nectar flow last year, late freezes and malnutrition than to CCD.

"The thing about CCD is that they say they don't see a smoking gun," said Craft. "When I look at our losses, I see a smoking gun."

Widespread media reports about CCD have fueled rumors and much conjecture over the cause of the disorder -- including the proliferation of cell phone towers, genetically modified crops, certain pesticides and global warming. Scientists generally have dismissed the cell phone and global warming theories, but are studying other factors such as viruses, mites, mite control chemicals, the pesticide imidacloprid and other possible toxins or microbes. They do not regard CCD as a human health issue.

"We would like to hear from Kentucky beekeepers who are having problems, because it gives us a better feel for the extent of the problem, and the information may even provide us with some clues as to the cause," said Webster.

Beekeepers can e-mail Webster at [Thomas.Webster@kysu.edu](mailto:Thomas.Webster@kysu.edu) or call him at (502) 597-6351.

Byron Crawford's column appears on Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Reach him at (502) 582-4791 or [bcrawford@courier-journal.com](mailto:bcrawford@courier-journal.com). Comment on this column, and read previous columns, at [www.courier-journal.com/byron](http://www.courier-journal.com/byron).

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Looks like they may have gone back home. The honey bee isn't native to the North American continent. They were brought over here from Europe. Perhaps they got homesick! 😊😊😊

Posted: Sun May 13, 2007 6:30 pm

well the bees have to be going somewhere. I know you ultra right wingers pshaw anything to do with the earth or environment, but our government needs to put full resources into this, this could really come back to bite. Too few people in this country realize how important some creatures are to our lives.

Posted: Fri May 11, 2007 8:09 am

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